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ABSTRACT

This document reviews the competency-based teacher education movement (CBTE). The first portion discusses the definitions of CBTE. The second portion reviews the basic elements of CBTE: individualized instruction, personalization of instruction, student involvement, effective management systems, and a field-centered approach. Criticisms of CBTE are presented in addition to statements about the need for CBTE. (MJM)

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WHY COMPETENCY-BASED TEACHER EDUCATION

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WHY COMPETENCY-BASED TEACHER EDUCATION*

Competency-based or performance-based teacher education is the "in-thing" currently in teacher education. Indicative of this movement are the results of a recent survey conducted by the PBTE Project of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Of the 783 teacher producing institutions which responded to the survey, 125 stated that they had established CBTE programs, another 430 reported that they were either investigating or developing CBTE programs. Only 228 institutions responding indicated that they were not involved with CBTE.**

Further evidence of this trend is seen in the activities of state legislatures and state boards of education where many states are adopting competency-based certification as a convenient and handy way of demanding and achieving that elusive "accountability" from the school system. Some form of a competency-based program has been required, for example, in Florida, California, Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, New York, Texas, Utah, and Washington.

The importance of CBTE can be seen in the interest of the Office of Education in this area. Allen Schmieder, Educational Program Officer, National Center for the Improvement of Educational Systems, for example, stated that "competency-based teacher education appears to hold great promise and is a notion which deserves adequate testing."[1] The Teacher Corps has in the past and is continuing to stipulate that all programs it underwrites or supports have a competency-based approach to education.

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*Although the author is indebted to his discussions and association with the AACTE Committee on Performance-Based Teacher Education for many of the ideas exhibited in this paper, the author assumes full responsibility for the contents.

**The number of institutions operating or developing PBTE programs represents the perception of one person at each institution, as reflected in a national survey by the PBTE Project, and should be interpreted with caution.

Private foundations have supported such efforts as the National Commission of Performance-Based Education, the Manpower Project in educational media, and the conversion of some "traditional" programs to competency-based programs.

During these austere times of budget cutbacks and terminated programs, one cannot help but gaze in awe and reverence at a movement which receives the financial support and blessings of the Office of Education, state governments, and private foundations.

What then is CBTE? What is this thing that 125 institutions indicated they are doing and another 430 reported that they are talking about doing? What is it that has arroused the support of governments and foundations?

Ironically, there is no clear cut single definition of CBTE which is accepted by all educators in the field. This lack of a definition does not constitute a substantial criticism, I think, because the definitions do not usually differ that much in substance and because the resulting fluid situation affords proponents of varied approaches to CBTE the opportunity to demonstrate the superiority of their respective programs. Let's look at a few definitions of CBTE.

Wilford Weber defines CBTE as follows:

> A competency-based teacher education program is a program in which the competencies to be demonstrated by the student and the criteria to be applied in assessing the competencies of the student are made explicit, and the student is held accountable for meeting these criteria.[2]

Theodore Andrews and Wendell C. Allen stated:

> Competency-based teacher education refers to programs that are: (a) field centered; (b) individualized:(c) based on specific performance criteria; (d) controlled by a consortium made up of representatives of at least colleges/universities, professional teacher organizations, and representatives of the schools involved.[3]

Robert Howsam stated that CBTE:

> ... is the application of the principles and practices of performance-based instruction to teacher preparation .... PBI has four essential elements. These elements are: (a) precise objectives stated in behavioral terms; (b) performance criteria, indicators of performance, modes of assessment, and criterion levels specified and made public along with objectives, (c) instruction pertinent to the criteria; and (d) learner accountability in terms of the criteria.[4]

Stanley Elam, writing for the PBTE Committee of AACTE, stated that:

> ... in performance-based programs performance goals are specified, and agreed to, in rigorous detail in advance of instruction. The student must either be able to demonstrate his ability to promote desirable learning or exhibit behaviors known to promote it.[5]

In addition, Elam listed five essential characteristics, each of which must be an integral part of a teacher preparation program before it can appropriately be labeled competency-based. These elements are:

1. Competencies (knowledge, skills, behaviors) to be demonstrated by the student are derived from explicit conceptions of teacher roles, stated so as to make possible assessment of a student's behavior in relation to specific competencies, and made public in advance.

2. Criteria to be employed in assessing competencies are based upon, and in harmony with, specified competencies; explicit in stating expected levels of mastery under specified conditions; and made public in advance.

3. Assessment of the student's competency uses his performance as the primary source of evidence; takes into account evidence of the student's knowledge relevant to planning for, analyzing, interpreting, or evaluating situations or behaviors; and strives for objectivity.

4. The student's rate of progress through the program is determined by demonstrated competency rather than by time or course completion.

5. The instructional program is intended to facilitate the development and evaluation of the student's achievement of competencies specified.[6]

I want to talk for a moment about Elam's definition with its concomitant "essential elements" for one reason because it is probably the best know definition in the nation, and, secondly, because it is the most rigorus in specifying what constitutes a competency-based program.

Think about Elam's "essential elements" again. How many of you who head-up or are a part of a so-called "traditional" teacher preparation program would deny that most of these elements are a part of your program. Are not the knowledge, skills, and behaviors (competencies) your students are expected to demonstrate role-derived? Are not competencies and assessment criteria made public in advance, at least in course syllabuses and program objectives? Isn't a student's performance, either on tests or in the student teaching experience, taken as the primary measure of his or her competence? Who among us does not strive for objectivity, even when we are judging a student on a subjective basis? And who would deny that their total instructional program is designed to promote competent teachers?

I think that with a little ingenuity, a college of education could quite expertly re-write its objectives, produce a few competency statements, and proclaim itself a competency-based program; thereby neatly circumventing any state legislature requiring a competency-based program and announcing to its neighbor institutions that it is really "with-it" in its adoption of the latest innovation. The adoption of a CBTE program is obviously more than this. The adoption of a competency-based program involves a psychological and material commitment to a re-organization and perpectual re-evaluation of the teacher preparation process. Let us

look at just one of the "essential elements" and examine some of the implications. Elam stated that competencies are "derived from explicit conceptions of teacher roles." This deceptively simple criterion elicits a monumental task. How can we be sure that the knowledge, skills, and behaviors we require of teacher education students are role-derived? One can speculate on the competencies an effective teacher should have. Or, one could go to the literature and identify the various competencies needed by the effective teacher which are recorded in the literature. These processes, no doubt, have merit, but it reminds one of the Middle Ages when, I am told, scholars spent many hours debating, arguing, and searching the works of Aristotle, Galen, and others in an attempt to determine how many teeth could be found in the mouth of a horse. It apparently never occured to them, or was to demeaning to their scholarly dignity, to simply locate the nearest barn with the nearest horse, open the horse's mouth and count his teeth.

Possibly the best method, then, of determining teacher competencies would be to go straight to the horse's mouth, that is, to the classroom to observe the teacher in the act of teaching. Through a process of task analysis, the behaviors, skills, and knowledge needed by a teacher are identified and form the basis for the teacher preparation program. Task analysis of the teaching process is a long and arduous procedure. It is an on-going process that is never really completed, but through "successive approximation " competencies selected become more and more to represent the reality of the teacher in the classroom.

My digression into the role-derived nature of competencies was a way of illustrating the necessary psychological and material committment to a competency-based program if the program is to be a truly competency-based one. It is easy to pay lip-service to the "essential elements," but it is a different thing again to adopt the stance necessary to fully implement a competency-based program.

How, then, can we breath life into these relatively innocuously-appearing but pregnant elements that are a part of all competency-based programs? This can be done through the adoption of a series of catalysts. These catalysts are so interwoven with competency-based programs that it is doubtful a competency-based program exists without them. Conversely, their existence can and is often taken as evidence that a competency-based program is in operation.

I shall breifly summarize these all important catalysts.

The first catalyst is the individualization of instruction. In a competency-based program a student is able to develop at his or her own rate. This is facilitated through the development and student use of instructional modules. Modules are sets of learning activities designed to assist the student in achieving pre-specified objectives. Since a student can work on the module at his own rate, he is no longer locked into the semester or quarter system. In this self-pacing system, time is no longer a constant. Time is the variable and the level of learning is the constant.

Personalization of instruction is the second catalyst. Charles Silberman, in Crisis in the Classroom,[7] noted that a major criticism of the educational system today is the "mindlessness" which permeates the

entire system. Too often things are done with no clear understanding of the rationale behind these actions. Competency-based programs, with their explicitly stated objectives, afford the student an opportunity to undergo meaningful learning experiences. Competency-based programs recognize the uniqueness of individuals and provides them with many alternative routes to reach the program objectives. No longer is a student locked into a series of lectures or a particular textbook. Personalization of instruction permits a student, with the help of his advisors, to tailor his own program.

The third catalyst in implementing a CBTE program is student involvement. Students play an active role in competency-based programs. Probably the best example of this is student accountability for demonstrating competencies. In this program students would not be graded on the basis of some supposed normal curve that exists in the classroom. Pre-specified competencies would have to be meet before that course, unit, or module is completed. A student could no longer earn a "below average" grade in one area with the expectation of balancing this with an "above average" grade in another area. If certain competencies are judged necessary for successful teaching, then these competencies must be demonstrated prior to certification.

Concomitant with student accountability is the emphasis on exit requirements rather than entrance requirements. Traditionally, teacher education programs have mandated entrance requirements which call for something like two tenths of a quality point above the "C" average and possibly a statement and recommendation relative to the applicants moral character. I have never seen any research studies which would indicate that these two tenths of a quality point made the difference between an

effective and an ineffective teacher. Certainly one must wonder in 1973 if an institution, especially a public institution, has the prerogative to judge moral character. Be that as it may, the dropping of all entrance requirements suggests the possibility of getting students from more diverse backgrounds--students who will be judged on the basis of what they can do at the completion, not what they have done prior to admission to the program.

Since students are seen as adults and given responsibility for their own learning, it is not supprising that they are included in the decision-making process in competency-based programs. Administrators and faculty alike see teacher preparation as the beginning of a career long process of discovery and learning. Consequently, students are involved at all stages in the planning, development, and evaluation of current and planned programs.

The fourth catalyst is the adoption of an effective management system. The early administrative tasks identified by Gulick--planning, organizing, staffing, directing, co-ordinating, reporting, and budgeting--are recognized as activities which must be consciously coordinated toward the achievement of program goals. The effective management system, moreover, takes more than a passing interest in the relationship of an institution with its environment. Competency-based programs utilize an open-systems approach which, according to Katz and Kahn,[8] "begins by identifying and mapping the repeated cycles of input, transformation, output, and re-newed input which comprise the organizational pattern."

"Input" is the total configuration of students, faculty, administration, physical plant, and environmental influences on the teacher preparation

process. "Transformation" represents the behavioral and attitudinal changes resulting from the educational process, and "output" is, of course, the finished product or "teacher." "Re-newed input" is again the material and human inputs into the system but with modifications resulting from feedback from the environment. The feedback loop is possibly the most revolutionary aspect of the competency-based program because the feedback loop involves a systematic effort to establish a research oriented program. On the global level, feedback through research will indicate whether indeed the competency-based program is producing more effective teachers than traditional programs. On the sub-system level, feedback through research will make it possible for the technology, modules, behavioral modification techniques, protocol and training materials, program objectives, and other segments of a total program to be improved, modified, or discontinued. This represents a significant advance over traditional approaches where courses or content are dictated by intuition, regulation, or, quite literally, by tradition.

The fifth catalyst in the implementation of a competency-based program is a field centered approach. With its emphasis on early entry into the teaching environment in such roles as teacher aides, tutors, and small group discussion leaders; the exhibition of appropriate teaching behaviors in an actual classroom situation; and the translation of theory into practice; it is little wonder that a field centered approach is not a luxury but a real necessity to implement an effective program.

A field centered approach, however, is much more than simply getting students involved with the school in an early and systematic manner, and professors teaching classes in the field. A field based program involves the integration of the public schools, teacher organizations, state departments of education, professional organizations, and community representa-

tives into the teacher education decision-making process. This widening of the decision-making base should be regarded with the knowledge that greater participation and more extensive inputs can contribute to a more effective teaching-learning situation.

I think that many educators would agree that competency-based teacher education, as defined and implemented with the catalysts just discussed, has a great potential for power, a power which Ben Rosner suggested, "resides in the clear expression of the objectives of the teacher education program and the ability to assess teacher competencies."[9]

J. Bruce Burker, in an analysis of the significance of curriculum design in teacher education, stated that:

> ... competency-based teacher-education programs can create a liberating environment for teacher candidates. A competency-based program has the philosophical aim of restoring the capacity to contend with the world on equal terms; this restoration is the overall goal of a competency-based education.[10]

Robert Howsam, in discussing the advantages of CBTE, stated:

> (CBTE) has the precision necessary to the training task and the flexibility needed to preserve the individuality of the practitioner. In addition, it is throughly consistent with the avowed principles upon which our society is based. It is rooted in respect for the individual. It gives fuller measure of equality of opportunity. It encourages both independent and interdependent behavior--and it is efficient.[11]

Not all educators share in this unabated enthusium for CBTE, however. Robert Nash and Russell Agne have cautioned that:

> A program that stresses performance criteria, measurable outcomes, specifically planned objectives, a systems-analysis approach, and pre- and postassessment techniques risk including in its curriculum only those learnings that are capable of being objectively measured. Consequently other types of learning that defy precise assessment will be underplayed or ignored.[12]

This fear and exasperation that CBTE programs will concern themselves with only the "simpliest and most primitive aspects of what is expected of modern education" is best summed up by Arthur Combs who, in lamenting

the popularity of behavioral objectives stated:

> The madness has even spread to some teachers colleges where teachers currently in training are expected to check themselves out against thousands of teacher "competencies," another name for behavioral objectives.[13]

Harry Broudy,[14] in a critique of CBTE, questioned the premise that all prospective teachers have the potential of becoming the "ideal teacher" that CBTE promotes. He suggested that CBTE has the potential of producing good technicians, but for the cadre of professional teachers who are not only technicians but theoreticians, CBTE would fall short.

The criticisms of CBTE can be summed up essentially as follows: A teacher education program is more comprehensive and complex than can be conveyed through a list of competency goals and objectives; there is a danger the program will concentrate on lower order learning levels; teacher preparation should not be limited to those things which can be stated in behavioral terms; and committment to competency-based programs should not be made before a consensus on the behaviors needed by effective teachers is reached.

I will not comment on these criticisms in detail since I have alluded to these areas already in this paper. Suffice it to say that proponents of CBTE would argue that competency-based programs are more "human" than traditional programs, witness this statement in the Cooper and Weber scenario on CBTE:

> Our program has a heavy human relations emphasis. Our initial experience in the program is focused on human relations training--giving and receiving feedback, team development, self-awareness kinds of things ... The seminars ... were intended to provide us with an opportunity to talk about our problems, share ideas, seek help, explore our values, further develop our interpersonal communication skills, and, in short, to provide a home base in a program that has allowed us to go our own way.[15]

CBTE proponents would also argue that a competency-based program need not become grossly oriented toward the simplistic lower-level cognitive objectives. Competency-based program operators recognize this danger and deliberately build into their program modules or activities with expressive or exploratory objectives, that is, objectives that cannot be measured but would appear to contribute to the intellectual and social development of the prospective teacher.

Be that as it may--we could go with count, pointer-count at some length--the making or breaking of CBTE will come through the evaluation process. As you may have noticed, throughout this paper I have used the term "effective teacher" or "competent teacher" in talking about CBTE. The question arises, then, does the implementation of a CBTE program guarantee the production of a competent teacher, or more precisely, a teacher who is significantly more competent or effective than than those produced under the aegis of a traditional program? This question is the Achilles heel of the CBTE movement, and it is a question that must be faced squarely. Research efforts which will shade light on this must be designed and implemented. This is no mean task as educators well know. Ned Flanders summed up the problem quite succinctly:

> It seems to me inescapable that we in teacher education must ultimately agree on certain basic teaching skills. We must also agree on how performance on particular basic teaching skill can be measured. We must find ways that the teacher training institution can collect performance data and compile them into a standardized display which can serve as an indication of teaching effectiveness. These procedures must permit us to compare first year teachers from two different institutions. What all this means to me is that we have a hell of a lot of work to do which will require a kind of cooperation, coordination, and interdependence which we seldom achieve and, I would guess, are not likely to achieve easily.[16]

Recongnition of this difficulty has prompted some competency-based program developers to debilitate the research-orientation of the program, or, as Elam indicated, add the research aspect of the program only as an "afterthought."

Iris Elfenbein, in an analysis of eighteen competence-based programs, noted the lack of data supporting the contention that CBTE programs are more effective than traditional programs, and stated:

> In the absence of hard data it was difficult to accept the enthusiasm of all concerned as evidence that the program itself was effective in making significant changes in teacher education and teacher performance.[17]

Obviously what is needed is a systematic, long-rang study of CBTE programs. The Committee on National Program Priorities in Teacher Education addressed itself to just that problem. Richard L. Turner, writing for the committee, outlined several criterion levels for teacher evaluation. Criterion Level 1 is a performance level at which a long-range (at least two years) study of the relationship between teacher behaviors and student cognitive and affective learning can be made. One of the committee recommendations was that such a study be supported by the Office of Education.

The National Commission on Performance-Based Education has recently completed a feasibility study for a multi-year evaluation study of CBTE programs. The Commission recommended and is seeking funding from a private foundation to initiate this assessment study.

Even if these national efforts do materialize, it is still the responsibility of the operators and participants of competency-based programs, themselves, to develop thorough evaluative studies of their program. The feedback loop, characteristic of the management system approach, necessitities the establishment of this assessment process. Competency-

based programs, then, have within them through its inherent evaluation process the seeds of its own destruction or the seeds of its own fulfillment.

Now we arrive at the central question of this paper, why CBTE? If we cannot demonstrate that we are producing a better teacher through competency-based programs, is it worth the hassel to establish one? I think the answer to that is yes, but not yes for everyone and every institution. We can say yes to CBTE because of the power of compelling logic. It makes sense to have clearly stated role-derived objectives, to develop a field centered approach, to individualize and personalize instruction, to systematically develop and evaluate a program, to pre-specify performance mastery levels and modes of assessment, and to permit a student to progress at his own rate. CBTE would appear to me to be a logical, rational, and systematic way of producing effective teachers.

Until CBTE has proven itself superior to "traditional" approaches to teacher education, however, I would caution you against a wholesale conversion to CBTE, and indeed, encourage you to develop and operate a CBTE program only on an experimental basis.

I believe that CBTE, given effective leadership and financial support, has a real potential to revolutionize not only teacher education but all levels of education. It is important, however, that we do not neutralize the movement through the adoption of "watered-down" versions of CBTE programs in order to scamper on the band wagon. We must give existing and germinating CBTE programs the opportunity and time to grow and develop so that proponents and critics alike can adequately judge them. Given this opportunity to grow, I think competency-based teacher education will prove itself not simply another passing innovation, but the wave of the future.

NOTES

[1]Allen Schmieder, unpublished speech, National Conference on Performance-Based Teacher Education, Washington, D.C., Septerber 12, 1972.

[2]Wilford A. Weber. The Competency-Based Teacher Education Development Projects, Final Report, Project Number 0-0744, Syracuse University, 1971.

[3]Theodore Andrews and Wendell C. Allen,"Competency-Based Teacher Education," Journal of Research and Development in Education, Winter, 1972.

[4]Robert Howsam, "Some Basic Concepts," Today's Education. Vol. 61, April, 1972. pp. 33-40.

[5]Stanley Elam, Performance-Based Teacher Education: What is the State of the Art? Washington, D.C.: AACTE, 1971.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Charles E. Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom, New York: Random House, 1965.

[8]Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, The Social Psychology of Organization, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966.

[9]Ben Rosner, The Power of Competency-Based Teacher Education, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc. 1972.

[10]J. Bruce Burker, "Curriculum Design," in Competency-Based Teacher Education, W. Robert Houston and Robert B. Howsam, (eds.). Palo Alto: SRA, 1972.

[11]Robert Howsam, op. cit.

[12]Robert J. Nash and Russell M. Agne, "Competency in Teacher Education: A Prop for the Status Quo?" Journal of Teacher Education. Vol XXII, No. 2, Summer, 1971.

[13]Arthur W. Combs. "Educational Accountability: Beyond Behavioral Objectives." Gainsville: University of Florida Center for Humanistic Education. (Mimeographed.)

[14]Harry S. Broudy. A Critique of Performance-Based Teacher Education. Washington, D.C.: AACTE, 1972.

[15]Wilford A. Weber and James M. Cooper. Competency-Based Teacher Education: A Scenario. Washington, D.C.: AACTE, 1972.

[16]Ned A. Flanders. "Some Comments on Performance-Based Teacher Education." Berkeley: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. (Mimeographed.)

[17]Iris M. Elfenbein. Performance-Based Teacher Education Programs: A Comparative Description. Washington, D.C.: AACTE, 1972.